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We think: Florida can help influence what America drives

EDITORIAL

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Florida's legislators are about to play a leading role in the fight to curb the emissions that cause global warming.

It's vital they not fumble it.

The state's Environmental Regulation Commission handed legislators the part Tuesday by approving rules first passed in California that demand greater fuel efficiency in cars and trucks.

Now it's the Legislature's turn to sign on, not only because it's in Florida's interest to do everything it can to curb climate change, but because doing so could have an impact far beyond the Sunshine State.

The rules would require another drop in greenhouse-gas emissions from cars and trucks sold in the state that, by 2015, would cause them to average a sweet 42 miles per gallon. That's more than current federal standards that would have vehicles averaging 35.7 miles a gallon.

But in adopting the tough standards that auto-industry officials in Florida so vehemently oppose, legislators also would be sending a powerful message to lawmakers in Washington, who over the next several months will be deciding how forcefully they should regulate Detroit's automakers.

The message would be unequivocal: Even in a state like Florida, whose disdain for mass transit has helped fuel its appetite for automobiles large and small, it's no longer business as usual.

It's a message that Congress needs to hear. Some of its members continue to resist imposing greater regulations on the auto industry that scientists say are needed to fight global warming.

It's a message Florida's lawmakers could send by approving the emissions reduction in a special session on the state budget. It's guaranteed to be heard in Washington.